

State of the City Address
Given by City Manager Mike Matthes
June 22, 2016

Thank you for coming this morning.

It is my honor and my duty, as required by our home rule charter, to share an annual State of the City message with you.

As I thought through what I wanted to share with you today, I was struck by how connected we all are.

We as Columbians are individuals, families and neighbors. We are not just a city ... we are a community. What happens to one person, one family... one neighborhood... ripples throughout Columbia.

Because we're connected, we acknowledge that the hope of a fine life in our city is more likely for some than for others.

I am constantly reminded that there are troubling financial, health and employment gaps between Columbia's white families and black families.

However, there is reason for hope. As I've said in the past, we only need to look around to see that Columbia has incredible resources and the ability to change its current reality, to assure that its high quality of life is open to all citizens.

We envision a Columbia that is the best place for *everyone*...not just some...to live, work, learn and play.

We envision a community where people earn enough to support their families without asking for help.

We envision a community where residents feel safe and secure and like their neighborhoods.

We envision a community where, regardless of what part of our city they live in, families know they can rely on police and fire protection, utility services and well-maintained streets and transit systems.

We envision a community that people choose to call "home" because life is good here.

Less than a year ago, many of you... our partners...were with me here in this room when we unveiled the City Council's bold Strategic Plan in an effort to address five priority issues.

- The economy;
- Social equity;
- Public safety;
- Infrastructure; and

- Operational excellence.

This morning I am excited to share with you many amazing accomplishments from just the last eight months.

I want to honor and thank several local partners with long traditions of shrinking the gap in well-being for Columbia families. They connect to the City of Columbia through joint projects, funding relationships and shared services to residents. They are bailing the water.

- Through their poverty simulations, Central Missouri Community Action has awakened hundreds of people...including those in City government...to the persistent problem of poverty in Columbia.
- Heart of Missouri United Way believes that “...when we reach out a hand to one, we influence the condition of all.” Last year’s campaign funded close to \$3 million in programs with long-term community impact, focusing on what it takes to help young people succeed.
- Columbia Public Schools’ intense focus on graduating students is paying off. The 18-year old who enters the workforce with a diploma or GED has a very good shot at getting out and staying out of poverty.
- Job Point has worked for decades to give folks a second chance to get ready for work. Last year they served 432 people with a wide range of workplace challenges.
- Every year, the Columbia Housing Authority helps 1,900 families afford decent housing throughout the city. Working with Welcome Home, the Veterans Administration, Veterans United, Shelter Insurance and other local supporters, the Housing Authority created Patriot Place. This four-acre campus includes apartments, and support services to help returning veterans reconnect to civilian life and get back on track.

The work of organizations like these truly benefits all of us, and that’s something we should remember.

The City Council’s Strategic Plan is intended to address the gaps we see in Columbia. Council Members wisely used savings from the previous fiscal year to begin to walk this new path. Here’s where they invested those funds.

1. Half-a-million dollars to Veterans Welcome Home - to house homeless veterans
2. \$200,000 for four energy efficient affordable homes
3. \$100,000 for home-ownership program down-payment assistance
4. \$50,000 to Cradle-to-Career early childhood learning
5. \$100,000 for focus group research to learn more about the disconnect between the reality and perception of crime, citizen views on growth and neighborhood needs
6. A half-million dollars for the Columbia Regional Airport Terminal Project

Those programs are making a difference in connecting and strengthening our community.

I would like to briefly share what we see, what we've done... and what lies ahead in our five strategic priorities.

Regarding the Economy... as I mentioned last year, there are truly two Columbia's. Our community's city-wide unemployment rate remains about 3%, one of the lowest in the nation.

Yet, many Columbians work full-time jobs that don't pay a living wage. Our community's black households bear the brunt of low wages, higher than average unemployment and poverty.

The only way out of poverty is a job that pays a living wage. Cultivating good jobs AND preparing our residents to qualify for those jobs are the strongest steps we can take to defeat poverty.

Our goal is to increase the number of people in Columbia with an income above 200% of the Federal poverty level.

In the past eight months we've seen steady progress towards career training. I believe an individual's success has its roots in childhood, with quality education and high school graduation strongly linked to future success. Because the community continues to support Columbia Public Schools, graduation rates improved to 90 percent in 2014.

Since 1982, the City's Career Awareness Related Experience...or C.A.R.E... program has prepared at-risk youth, ages 14 to 20, for employment. In addition to paid, real-world experience, C.A.R.E. helps participants get job-ready, find a mentor, explore careers and manage their money. Last summer we paid the wages of 169 young folks who worked in the community. Of that group, 160 completed the program and 42 were offered employment.

The Mechatronics Certificate and Degree program, offered at the Columbia campus of Moberly Area Community College ... or MACC, is a model for how a united partnership can lead to economic success. Launched in 2012 by MACC, the City's Economic Development Department, and local employers, Mechatronics provides trainees with hands-on experience in electrical systems, hydraulics, pneumatics and computer-controlled equipment. Graduates are finding jobs at 3M, Kraft, JM Eagle and

Boone Hospital Center with starting wages of \$16 per hour, and higher.

This year we launched the City's first real drive to widen opportunities for minority- and women-owned businesses. As our contractor, Jim Whitt is coaching aspiring owners and working with City staff to reduce bureaucratic barriers that put small firms at a competitive disadvantage. A "summit" connecting these businesses with state and local officials and large purchasers was standing-room-only.

"Social equity" has so many meanings. It's a big concept that inspires global or community action, a precise idea that moves us to be our brother's or sister's keeper and a lot more in-between. Guided by our strategic plan, the City will assess citizens' ability to thrive...not just survive...in Columbia. We know there are disparities among neighborhoods, including the level of public investment and focused attention. At least initially, we will leverage City services and community partnerships in Columbia's Central, North and East areas.

Census data, maps of City service calls and City staff field observations reveal varying levels of stress and disparity...along with resources...in these neighborhoods. According to our most recent citizen survey, 74% of residents overall are satisfied that they can thrive in Columbia. While 78% of white residents hold this view, only 54% of black residents agree.

Our goal is to increase the percentage of citizens who agree that Columbia is a place where they can thrive.

At the community level, City Council members co-hosted a Race and Equity Forum, which drew almost 100 people. With our community partners, we're committed to being part of conversations that raise local awareness of race and equity.

On a personal level, and at her own expense, City Utilities staff member Carol Schafer reaches out to homeless persons, and her generous spirit inspires others. She gives granola bars wrapped with information about homeless shelters and support services to folks who look like they need help. So do her friends...and her colleagues...and local service organizations. She is a quiet leader and an individual force for good.

As a united force, City employees are engaging residents in the Central, North and East neighborhoods as never before. It's work from the heart.

We're betting that "thriving" is associated with several factors: safe and secure neighborhoods; stronger relations between neighbors; and affordable housing and utilities.

Here are some of the things we've done since January.

- Created a Community Outreach Unit in the Police Department. By assigning two officers to each of the focus neighborhoods, we've established a consistent, trusted, focused presence for safety and security.

- Connected neighbors through more than 20 activities in these areas.
- With the Ridgeway Neighborhood Association and other partners, developed a model affordable housing plan.
- Allocated more funds for first-time homebuyers and affordable housing units in the focus neighborhoods and started work to set up a community land trust to stabilize housing prices.
- Studied residential energy use in the Derby Ridge area, and hosted an energy efficiency resource fair at the neighborhood school's parent-teacher night.
- With community partners, we're providing summer lunch programs and weekly mobile food pantries for kids and families.
- Started work with historically black church congregations to connect parishioners with health insurance and health services.

Glenn Cobbins and Judy Hubbard, have proven abilities to identify with, reach and inspire people. They're having door-to-door conversations in the Central neighborhood. They talk to students, older and disabled persons, black residents, persons with few resources, young people on the verge of high-risk decisions and those re-entering from the criminal justice system...people who seldom, if ever, contact City officials.

Carl Kenney, Jr. is an experienced neighborhood organizer, adjunct professor at the University Of Missouri School Of Journalism and our contractor skilled in building local decision-making structures. His work in Durham, North Carolina encouraged residents to take their futures into their own hands, leading to lasting change rather than one-off interventions. We're hosting the first meeting in the Central neighborhood tomorrow at St. Luke Church. We invite you to sit down with us for a meal from 4-6 pm and then join the meeting from 6 to 8 pm.

When it comes to feeling safe, and if Columbia is, in effect, two cities...it also has two minds regarding public safety. Our crime rates are down. We would have to double, triple and quadruple our crime rates to match those, respectively, in Springfield, Kansas City and St. Louis. Even as our crime rates drop, however, so has citizen satisfaction with many public safety services.

Our goal is to increase the percentage of citizens who are satisfied with the overall quality of police services.

Over the last ten years, satisfaction with Police services has dropped 22 percent. To understand this lost ground, even while crime rates have fallen over the last 30 years, we held anonymous citizen focus groups conducted by an independent consultant.

Most participants reported positive contacts with and trust in Police officers. Few had been affected by crime directly, and many wished to see more officers in the community. Many said that local media had influenced their perception of safety and acknowledged the effects of events in Ferguson and “mass shootings across the country.”

The Police Department’s new Community Outreach Unit is all about officers connecting with citizens in the focus neighborhoods, and our strategic timing couldn’t be better. Citizens helped choose and have welcomed their officers as a stable influence. And CPD has the right mix of leaders, management and officers...with the right hearts and minds...for this work. This is not a “one-off” for them. They’re building for the future.

Sgt. Mike Hestir and his officers are making positive contacts in their neighborhood visits and at special events. He says that citizens are “HIGHLY receptive to welcoming the Police back” and seeing Police interacting with citizens again. As cops and citizens of all ages connect, he’s seeing fewer “hard stares” and getting more handshakes and hugs.

Here’s a Facebook post from a driver stranded at I-70 and Highway 63 connector: “When no one had the patience or time to help me, this officer not only helped me but took me to Walmart and bought me a new car battery! Officer Jeff...I appreciate your help today and you were my hero.”

Lt. Geoffrey Jones replied, “Many officers would have found a way to help this young lady. She was supportive of me and us publicly, even with some personal attacks from her friends. She was courageous, more so than me that day.”

Lt. Jones is right. Our entire Police force is in the habit of helping. I love it when citizens “catch” City employees doing something good and share their stories. As these go viral across social media, it confirms the public’s power to counter negative information with the powerful true story of caring, courageous public service.

We’re gradually balancing community access to Police services in the strategic areas. The Boone Community Center substation now serves Ward 1 residents. We’ve purchased land in Ward 2, near Auburn Hills Parks, for a North side Police station. Ward 3 residents will soon connect with the Community Outreach Unit and other Police officers at a leased townhome near Indian Hills Park.

This year, it’s possible that both our Police and Fire departments will attain accreditation. This is the gold standard for a non-biased, external validation that we provide services using the best practices in the field today.

Our infrastructure needs such as transportation networks, utilities and parks are “big time” investments

that connect Columbia. They serve the public good but, as the community has grown and changed, aren't serving all citizens equally well. No matter your neighborhood, you should be able to shop and find services either nearby or by using safe, convenient personal or public transit. In a city that treasures parks and trails, everyone should have green space within walking distance. Wherever you live, water, sewer, electric and stormwater systems should be safe and reliable.

Our goal is to increase daily average ridership at the "bus stop" level in the focus neighborhoods.

To introduce more residents to COMO Connect, Community Outreach officers and Central Missouri Community Action are distributing bus passes in the focus neighborhoods. Whether the passes are good for one ride, one month or a whole year, they create positive community connections.

At the request of North neighborhood residents, the City Council quickly approved more street lighting near Auburn Hills Park. We've built new sidewalks in the Central neighborhood on Garth Avenue near OAK Towers.

The community has supported ballot issues for sewer and storm water improvements in the past year. With that support, we're investing 14 million dollars to reline sewer pipes, and we continue to remedy flooding in the First Ward. Our test results show that sewer-lining efforts are paying good dividends.

Gates Park is our new 60-acre natural area near High Point Lane and Route K. This purchase will preserve green space, protect the Little Bonne Femme Creek and provide access to a future trail.

The Council's Strategic Plan could not be implemented without the dedication of our staff. City employees are a 1,450-person force for good. In strategic terms, they are our greatest strength and creative heart. They are work colleagues connected to each other and are intimately connected to the community through friendships, their business patronage, the organizations they support and all the things they do as parents and family members. I am intensely proud of their commitment to serving all citizens and to putting special care into the Central, North and East neighborhoods over the next three years.

Our goal is to increase employee engagement.

For our workforce, engagement is linked to a strong public service calling, something that comes from inside. Stoking this fire will improve our performance and create lasting public benefits.

The City of Columbia attempts to foster a work family that is as representative of our community as possible. "Diversity" means opening all doors to people of different races, generations, genders and backgrounds. "Inclusion" means creating a work environment where all employees...not just some...can thrive. Some of our work units are both diverse and inclusive. They provide hubs for friendships, trust,

professional growth and advancement. Still, there are gaps in the organization and in the community's perception.

We are joining other local leaders in recognizing and eliminating institutional biases we might have. These biases are based on race, disability and other perceptions that can separate us as human beings. Last December, 140 managers and supervisors attended classes on diversity and inclusion, and 15 employees participated in Building Inclusive Communities workshops. By the end of this year we expect to have six certified, in-house trainers available to offer basic and advanced workshops to another 143 employees. We also expect that all sworn Columbia Police officers will complete training relating to racial profiling and fair and impartial policing.

Over the last two years, our customer contact center has reduced the number of possible phone numbers you might call to reach us by more than half. We see a future where, unless there's an emergency or need for a Text Telephone, there's only one number to call. We're already getting rave reviews from customers. They love not getting transferred from office to office when they call. They love getting the right answer to their question, and they love seeing the potholes filled within just a few days of their call.

I'm proud of what our staff has done in eight short months, on a very small budget, made up of last year's savings. We aspire for steady, if perhaps slow, progress in the coming year.

Thank you for caring about our community through your partnerships, through your ideas, and by simply being involved. Look around...we are truly making a difference.

I would like to invite any Council members who wish to make a brief comment to the podium.